

New Trends in History Textbook Research: Issues and Methodologies toward a School Historiography

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Abstract • This article traces the developments within history textbook research as presented at the 2009 conference of the International Society for History Didactics (ISHD), held in cooperation with the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in Braunschweig, Germany. The article claims that significant developments reveal school historiography to be a challenged area for history didactics. Key concepts and theoretical frames require further discussion in order to develop history didactics not only as an area for social and political responsibilities but also as a theoretical discipline.

Keywords • history didactics, history education, history textbooks, methodology, multimodal text, school historiography, school narrative, textbook research

This article traces the significant lines of development within history textbook research as presented at the 2009 conference of the International Society for History Didactics (ISHD), held in cooperation with the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in Braunschweig, Germany. Titled “History Textbook Analysis: Methodological Issues,” the conference drew forty-five participants from twenty-six countries. This article addresses selected items that best represent current trends in methodology of history textbook research. The article claims that the evolution of history textbook research reveals that school historiography is a challenged area for history education as well as for social, historical, pedagogical, and/or political studies. It argues that significant conceptual and methodological generic transformations occur within the frame of this historiography and the corresponding research.

First, transformations emerge from a significant shift toward the content of a history textbook and its analysis. From a classical analysis



of content—linked with historiography—we move to a didactical view, influenced by new structural appearances of textbooks and changing teaching practices. Iconographic materials come to interrupt the unity of the written text and create a new multimodal text and content. Underestimated or marginalized in previous research, parts of the textbook conceptualized previously as paratext or iconography—and thus supplementary—are becoming the focus of inquiries and comparative research. A new unity is thus created, including various sources and educational material (e.g., texts, notes, diagrams, activities) significant of the history education metalanguage.

Second, transformations result from a movement toward a kind of text that does not give answers but supports the procedures of learning and fits in with the laboratory learning environment encouraged by most school subjects. It is an increasingly open narrative, supplemented by the students' own accounting of the past.

Third, there is a slow change turning the focus of research from the textbook as a product to its uses and perceptions. Within this framework, the interest of researchers addresses the practices involving the textbook in classrooms and the teachers' and students' reception of the textbooks rather than the messages included in the content or the goals of the producers as related to the state, the authors, and the market. Questioning the correlation between the uphill (content, production) and the downhill (use, perception) approach is a new trend, as is the attempt to integrate the textbook into the general cultural environment.

These developments affect the methodological and conceptual framework of textbook research. The old methods of written content analysis, often quantitative, are not sufficiently relevant for investigating and analyzing the multimodality of the new history textbooks. The focus on the uses of textbooks requires new methods for the collection and analysis of data. Observation of classrooms, the inquiry into the representations, and the experiences or even the memories of individuals call for methodologies often borrowed from the social sciences, offering both individual and comparative perspectives. Individuals are now considered active negotiators of the messages and the meanings; their use of textbooks depends on the social context. Comparative methods are thus needed to correlate the social, educational, and personal contexts of learning procedures. Quantitative approaches are employed increasingly seldom, being either replaced by or used as supplementary to, qualitative analysis. Increasing analytical complexity, crossed methodologies, and comparative methods thus question the traditional methodological framework of textbook research.

Changes in the focus, the approaches, and the methodology have brought about conceptual improvement and new questions. During the course of the ISHD conference, we noticed a significant broadening of the concept of the *narrative* in school historiography as far as textbooks

are concerned. It begins as a *multimodal narrative*; it then evolves into a *fragmented and reconstructed narrative*; finally, it becomes an *open narrative*. Is this indicative of changes in *narrative patterns* in school historiography? Questioning the conceptual framework of history textbook research presents an unprecedented opportunity for theoretical clarifications, which are indispensable for our field.

Textbooks as the Key Media of Research in History Didactics

History textbooks are the classical objects of history didactics research.¹ They are still the dominant translation of the curriculum in schools and they continue to constitute the most widely used resource for teaching and learning, despite the development of new media and educational technologies. They are often regarded as mirroring dominant contents and dominant practices.² They are perceived as national instruments perpetuating cultures and ideologies.³ They are believed to reflect the complicated relationships between power and knowledge.⁴ History textbooks, as social constructions, cultural artifacts, sources of collective memory, pieces of master narratives, and the autobiographies of nation-states,⁵ constantly attract critical attention. Finally, they are far easier to collect and organize into a corpus than any other effective data on history education.

History textbooks are investigated by history didactics as well as by other disciplines, especially political science, history of education, sociology of education, and linguistics. The questions worked out by political science are not far removed from some debated in the field of history didactics: stereotypes and ideology in school messages, concurrent political (hi)stories developed by different textbooks, links among power, social requirements, and history teaching.⁶ Linguistic approaches refer to the readability of history textbooks (analyzing language, implicit content, and narrative structure) and to the written text (enunciative, argumentative, and/or actantial discourse). And of course history of education has been devoted to textbooks, including history textbooks, creating data and supporting basic research for decades. The database Emmanuelle developed by Alain Choppin in France is a European reference.⁷

These different disciplinary traditions result in considerable richness. They provide opportunities to develop history didactics even where this domain has no specific reconnaissance or place in universities. But this richness might also result in some epistemological confusion, especially when methodologies and concepts travel carelessly from one social science to another. The ISHD conference demonstrated that there are many national or regional traditions, with different research cultures and different scientific regimes in history didactics, and revealed the need for a clarified language and for discussed theoretical frameworks. Like all dis-

ciplines, history didactics has become a worldwide cultivated discipline, which needs to escape from regionalisms and sectarianisms. Attending a world conference is a wonderful opportunity to develop a new common epistemic topos of reference on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to point out the necessary specificities and matters for discussion.

The history textbook is situated within a complex system. This allows us to question the textbook from many different points of view. Any textbook is set simultaneously in educational projects and practices, in scholarly and school-related epistemological contexts, under institutional constraints, political and ideological demands, social requirements and representations (recently developed by memory agencies), and it is of course an economic product with an enormous and often captive market. As an educational support medium, it refers implicitly or explicitly to the curricula, to the “vulgate” (traditionally approved to be taught and learnt in school⁸), to school culture, to the hidden curriculum, to the students, the teachers, the classroom, and the practices (reading, completing exercises, analyzing sources, etc.). A history textbook addresses history as taught in school, perhaps also referring to its relationships with other subjects. It acts within a subjects system as well as in a school system, privileging textual knowledge and contents, intellectual and practical abilities, or social aims and actions.⁹ At the same time, a history textbook relies on the historiographical and epistemological frames of academic history, as well as on the epistemological traditions that organize school knowledge and schoolbooks. It has to adapt to curricula, education policy, and to textbook production and approval processes. The ideological character of the system in which a history textbook is situated influences its contents and its layout, offering more or less space for autonomous thinking and debates. In order to be accepted by teachers and by parents and to find a social legitimacy, history textbooks must address social representations of “school history” and “the aims of learning history.” More specifically, they have to deal with the issue of the past as the propagator of collective identities, such as those held by communities, minorities, nations, Europe, or other supranational organizations. Within this scope, didactical and pedagogical changes might conflict with ideological and cultural traditions.

This complexity is reflected in the issue of changing textbooks. The principal difficulty in this domain is holding a balance between a “student-friendly” (educational) and a “didactically-true” (epistemological) textbook.¹⁰ Textbooks should “combine history as an objective process, history as an academic science, history as a school subject and history as a didactic product.”¹¹ At the same time, they should aim toward a user-friendly design; for example, pictures in textbooks should be used as historical sources per se. Textbook authors must override the culture or memory they are rooted in (social background), in order to create a “globally oriented” consciousness for students (ideological aim). Textbooks should

demonstrate that they are written by individuals, which challenges the status of school history knowledge. In Romania for instance, after the collapse of the communist regime, textbook production was affected by a wider range of influences than before. These included not only the conventional factors, such as education policy, educational ideas, academic knowledge (epistemology and historiography), editorial expertise, production quality and costs (economical aspects), but also teachers' and parents' expectations, media pressure, and public perceptions of what kind of history should be taught in schools (social requirements).¹²

How can research in didactics take into account this complex system when analyzing history textbooks? The same layout and appearance might have different meanings relating to the production process, institutional constraints, current competition on the publishing market, and so on.¹³ The procedures of textbook production and state approval might affect research as well. In Brazil for example, history textbooks are approached by most researchers as works and not as market goods. As a result, the issues of the production process are overlooked by textbook researchers and by the textbook assessment program. Underestimating these components of the textbooks system might lead to wrong conclusions.¹⁴ It might be the same when only history textbooks are studied, the research neglecting a broader context. For example, in Hungary, after 1989, the change affected all the textbooks, especially science textbooks.¹⁵ Such changes can be compared and contrasted between subject areas in order to ascertain which pertain to the school system and which to the discipline.

What place is occupied by history didactics, both as a research field and as prescriptive resources, in such a system? In several countries, research revealed the ideological bias and the epistemological or historiographical failures of the textbooks; however, it did not directly attempt to produce "better" history textbooks.

History Textbooks as Objects of Controversy

The framework presented here provides opportunities for debate and even for conflict related to history textbooks. The various papers presented at the conference revealed common trends. They unveiled the potential for diverse expectations and representations of the "good textbook" to clash, not only in terms of contents but also in terms of activities or the underlying pedagogical model. They also demonstrated the possibility for discrepancies between the institutional requirements and the actual teaching, which leads to passive or active opposition. Often, a particularly sensitive issue is the imaging of the national and/or the social self and of the Other. Globalization processes, post-totalitarian and post-colonial contexts intensify awareness of collective identities, nourishing the mne-

monic capital, and often shaping the past in different or even controversial schemes. History education—a main apparatus since the nineteenth century for the social production of national identities—and thus history textbooks, are the favorite topoi of the competing discourses resulting from controversial histories.¹⁶ Images of the Self and of the Other implicitly define who is rooted in a certain place, who is a “true” citizen of the state, and design the legitimate collective identity. Often, social groups find themselves ill-pictured or neglected, and demand more convenient or respectful accounts, either to be given their own identity (e.g., as native nations) or to be included in the historical self. Sometimes new dominant groups exert strong pressures for national and social correctness, against historiographical and/or pedagogical accuracies, as has been the case in South Africa.¹⁷ This inspires researchers to investigate portrayals of self, of minorities, and of otherness. A current methodology for analyzing the alleged bias is to confront the text of the textbook with a supposedly correct or balanced text on the same topic. But its reliability depends on the objectivity of this later text, and analyses have often lacked a strong theoretical framework.¹⁸ Several research projects have chosen a classical content analysis. This means, in its systematic form, an exhaustive inventory of all documents referring to a specific topic,¹⁹ without forgetting all the data and connections allowing for a qualitative analysis.²⁰ As we commented in our introduction, analysis is increasingly turning to qualitative methodologies.

The analysis might enlighten contradictions and ambiguities; for example, the German textbooks analyzed might take steps toward giving Jews a place in their historical narratives and documentation, while favoring a persecution paradigm and failing to avoid stereotypes.²¹ In some contexts, as for Israel and Palestine,²² the issue of imaging the Self and the Other is more acute. But when the debate is of a socially sensitive nature, the arguments scarcely rely on academic research. The social demand might be quite opposite to the researcher’s aims: in public opinion, black or golden legends might prevail in historically valid results, presenting obstacles to more accurate narratives, even in recent history textbooks.

Thus, history textbooks could be weapons in “history wars.”²³ But they could also be resources in peace education, as has been the aim of international organizations from the League of Nations to the present Council of Europe. One of the first objectives of the Georg Eckert Institute was to promote a balanced revision of German and French textbooks after World War II, and textbook revision continues to be a major issue today. History of education recalls attempts to revise history textbooks in order to promote cooperation,²⁴ and to lessen nationalism from the end of the nineteenth century.²⁵ The idea that “history textbooks should be improved to serve international understanding” is widely accepted.²⁶ Comparative research of Israeli, British, American, and German history

textbooks concludes that should national ideologies induce the violation of human rights, then perhaps history textbooks should teach a “non-violent disobedience” of civil law and military orders.²⁷

Production and Distribution of History Textbooks: Economy, State, and Authors

A number of papers presented at the conference addressed the general process of textbook production, which in many cases remains beyond the authors’ control. This process has to reconcile different purposes and intentions, both commercial and political.²⁸ Some contributions also dealt with changes in textbook production due to political, ideological, or social changes. It was stated that national myths often influenced discussions, even among historians, and that—specifically in the case of Scandinavian textbook revision²⁹—no links are established among the criticism of bias by the experts, the governmental or legal constraints, and the effective revision of the textbooks. In Romania, as well as in other former communist countries, the 1990s saw the publication of four to ten textbooks for each grade, but the publishers and authors were faced with the hasty solution of several problems. These included “to restore the position of history as a school topic,” “to balance academic integrity with market requirements,” “to focus on new methods and activities such as multi-perspectivity,” “to integrate national, European and world history, and to give ethnic or religious minorities fair treatment,” to name but a few. It is hardly surprising that such undertakings result in varying levels of success.³⁰ The case is more complex in the federal states, where there are differences between the federal and regional systems of textbook production. In Russia, the contradiction is obvious. The main battles arose with the issues of the apology for Stalinism, the glorification of the Soviet empire, and of the prevailing state power in Russian history: “a cold war of textbooks,” as Marat Gibatdinov has put it.³¹

Several contributions analyzed political control and policies of approval for history textbooks, including a complete overview of EU procedures.³² Five possible models were detailed: one single officially approved textbook; several officially approved textbooks; coexistence of officially approved and non-approved textbooks; officially recommended textbooks; and textbooks only produced by private publishers, without official approval. These models combine with two systems of textbook distribution: approved by the state or chosen by teachers, with some influence from the local community. State control, either *ex ante* or *ex post*, is effective through a great variety of procedures, ultimately, of course, affecting textbooks. In Greece, where school history is under siege by politics,³³ the centralized character of the education system, including the policy of

textbook approval, constitutes a hindrance for school historiography.³⁴ Tight state control, inflexible curricula, and strict and imperative guidelines for authors from the state Pedagogical Institute and the restriction to only one textbook combine to weaken the potential for diversification or deviation from “nationally correct” views of the past.

A recent and rather new topic is an increased interest in textbook authors. Prefaces of Danish history textbooks have been analyzed as the writer’s intention to make a covenant with the reader. The writer thus “reveals or discloses a programmatic description of his view of the ideal teaching of history,” as Harry Haue has suggested.³⁵ In another study, the voices of thirteen authors were heard³⁶; although they do not qualify themselves in the same way, they have social backgrounds, and their own education as well as initial teaching experience is rather recent. They claim that their writing of history has been influenced by their political attitudes as well as by official prescriptions and control. While some admit they were driven to write by the opportunity of an extra income or by their interest in creating a book, most of them say they have become better teachers on account of writing textbooks, even if their pedagogical and didactic ideas are not clear.

Most studies focusing on changes in the textbooks and political control are based on a corpus of written documents (e.g., textbooks, official prescriptions, texts detailing approval procedures, controversial articles in scientific revues, professional journals or public media), analyzed via a classical historical methodology. There were, however, also contributions to the conference based on oral sources as used in contemporary historiography, and relying on “life stories” as used in the social sciences. It has been pointed out³⁷ that the discussion of methodological issues has not been the core of these papers: in the academic tradition of history, the skill of textual analysis has been taken for granted as part of the historian’s competence and tools, and is seldom questioned.

The Contents of the Textbook: History in Light of Education

As we have seen, contents remain the favorite sub-category of history textbook research. Links between history textbooks and identities constituted a central aspect of this conference. History textbooks are thought to have a significant impact on the development of collective and specifically national identity. But the focus of research seems to have shifted from identifying the grand narrative of nation (*le roman national*) to analyzing representations of minorities or of dominated social categories. School textbooks have significantly shaped negative stereotypes in a variety of ways. They have done so through unfavorable and inaccurate depiction of the Other community; through the omission of the Other’s history and

culture; by ignoring peaceful periods of coexistence between the communities and stress on the conflictual eras; through a lack of elements that might promote trust and familiarity between two peoples;³⁸ and through the omission of the existing minority groups.³⁹ Another type of negative stereotype is to portray the minorities as passive and victims. This is frequently the case for the Jews when their contribution to European culture and European history, or even their resistance to Nazism, is not mentioned.⁴⁰ The same applies to the space allotted to women in history textbooks, most of which are written by men. An analysis of Austrian textbooks has shown that, even when they are not, “the mere fact of participation of women [in the writing] does not guarantee broadened representations of women in history.” Often women of the past are erased from pages, or merely depicted in “women’s corners” or “women’s history.” An analysis of images and language reveals a dominant sexism, at least up until the decree of 2002, which stipulated the use of gender-equitable formulations.⁴¹

Textbooks also promote political ideologies, and not only in dictatorial states. In Sweden, for example, the dominance of the Social Democratic Party for sixty-four years has resulted in a unified narration of the country’s history, which focuses on the working class, trade unions, and popular movements, and has induced textbooks to lend more importance to socialist foreign countries such as Cuba or Nicaragua.⁴² It should be remembered how difficult it would be to give an objective account of history, and how powerful the various forces within the system are in which the textbooks are produced.

Several conference contributions addressed the encouragement of historical thinking, analyzing “work orders”⁴³ or exercises,⁴⁴ promoting “research learning,”⁴⁵ or the critical use of primary sources.⁴⁶ Equally important to the learning process is the development of competence and narrative perspective.⁴⁷ Learning history, a core issue in abundant research, has recently expanded to textbook studies. This is set in a context where the school curricula, including those for the subject of history, are structured around abilities and “competencies.” The textbook must then offer—alongside the historical narrative—activities, laboratories, workshops, all aimed toward historical thinking. The exercises of Slovak textbooks, for instance, tend to focus on the authors’ texts rather than on sources, and are more oriented toward reading than toward thinking.⁴⁸ In this case, an agenda of exercises, questions, and tasks was proposed in order to increase their scope and focus on the students’ needs. Activities that would “stimulate the historical thinking of fifteen to seventeen year old students when placing concepts, events and persons in a timeline and historical context”⁴⁹ were also presented, further underlining the gap between this and traditional history teaching. The changes in the recent textbooks are also pedagogical: they meet age-group criteria and take into

account the constructive involvement of students in the learning process.⁵⁰ However, the link between past and present, though stressed by researchers in didactics, still appears seldom.

We have already ascertained that textbook contents are analyzed in a classical historical methodology, with a possible stress on the context, but with little discussion of the relevance and limits of the selected methods. Surprisingly, the use of lexical software is less common. Innovative research seems more linked to the issues than to any specific method. Moreover, “innovative methodological elements do not necessarily lead to new and interesting results ... No method can be given priority *per se*. Instead, the choice of method must depend on research questions and theoretical considerations.”⁵¹ Methodology is a matter of epistemology and theoretical background; it is not simply a set of tools.

The Use of History Textbooks: Teachers and Students

Perhaps the most recent trend in contemporary history didactics when dealing with textbooks is the consideration of the classroom context and the practices developed by teachers and students. They are aware that the reading, and not the text, passes on meaning and allows students to build an understanding of the past and of history. In order to acquire some knowledge of the role and effective use of textbooks, and to investigate why they are used the way they are, research has focused on students’ reading actions, on teachers’ instructions, and on interpretations of history textbooks by both groups. Such research requires observation and interviews, both of which are new methodologies in textbook research and which supplement content analysis or indeed constitute an object for study themselves.⁵²

A small survey in the UK (thirty teachers) has shown that only a minority of history teachers are making substantial use of textbooks. This tendency is usually connected to the teachers’ ideas regarding the use of new technology in the history classroom.⁵³ The Internet might substitute the textbook, all the more because it has become a directory of documents with few authorial texts. Some inquiries have focused on the use of specific sources⁵⁴ or of the textbook as a didactical tool.⁵⁵ In order to investigate these new questions, several researchers have chosen to interview teachers, and then to develop a qualitative analysis of the interviews.⁵⁶ A large-scale survey using quantitative analysis remains another traditional possibility.⁵⁷ Such a survey might shed light on the variables affecting teachers’ attitudes, including an adherence to a conception of history teaching relevant to “teacher narration,” a tendency toward specific training modules, or certain perceptions of the students’ interest in history.

Students (British ones at least) do not enjoy working from a textbook.⁵⁸ The teachers’ instructions and the organization of the lesson, as

well as the importance of the students' earlier experiences with textbooks (whatever the subject) influence what the students read in them.⁵⁹ Research on this is only in its first stages; the impact of using textbooks on students' achievement might constitute a new field of study.⁶⁰ The best method for investigating their effective use is classroom observation combined with interviews or surveys, on the Web or in person.⁶¹ Focus group interviews are a specifically relevant methodology when investigating students' attitudes toward textbooks, because "the schoolbook is a subject that probably only few, if any, students elaborate on their own ... the context of approaching the textbook is, in a sense, social", thus judged from the perspective of youth culture.⁶²

The "think-aloud" methodology could also be used in understanding historical texts.⁶³ The problems that arise from this are quite usual in methodologies for inquiry in the social sciences. First, students or teachers under observation might well act in a different way than usual, especially when there is a video recording. Similarly, the questionnaire might induce answers that are not the interviewees' effective references and wording. Second, interviewing and observing are time-consuming methods, which usually place a limit on the number of cases that can be studied.⁶⁴ As always in qualitative inquiries, it is not the representativeness but the depth of the study that renders it valid and heuristic. No doubt the results will be significant when available.

Changes of Focus and Conceptual Renewals

Changes in the design of textbooks as well as epistemological and pedagogical developments regarding the notion of "text" have oriented history didactics research from the written text to the documents and other elements comprising a history textbook. All these constitute the history text as a whole and contribute to its significance. The paratext enlarges the area of the content, and its expanse and diversity increase via documents, graphics, iconography, learning targets, cards, and colors defining specific areas for key notions or ideas.⁶⁵ Comparisons between the proposed activities, the text, the curriculum, and any didactic apparatus⁶⁶ constitute new objects of research. The historical narrative does not result only from the authors' narrative but also from the combined documents and exercises. Sometimes documents and authors' narratives are consistent; sometimes the documents qualify the text, and sometimes they suggest a different narrative.⁶⁷ In depictions of the Cold War, for instance, the iconography and stereotypes of Eastern and Western textbooks remained the same, although the elements used in narration had progressed.⁶⁸ Clearly, in research about narrative structures, the concepts of "content" and of "text" have been enlarged or reshaped.

Moreover, DVDs and CD-ROMs are often sold with the textbooks. This is rather a new development. In some cases, the electronic resources that accompany some books remain almost unused; students sometimes ignore the very existence of such media in the learning packages and teachers mostly concentrate on the teachers' materials. It is not easy to assess the impact of these resources. The field is developing, as publishers are increasingly commercializing textbooks with multimedia, including e-textbooks to be used in parallel with or independent of printed textbooks. Furthermore, students use information technology not only within their educational settings,⁶⁹ but also on their own. The latest trend is "on-line materials available on the Internet (knowledge base) which help individual learning, motivation, creating new teaching-learning methods and strategies."⁷⁰ Other new research analyzes empirically acoustic aspects of history textbooks, systematically examining elements of "silent" textbooks that evoke the "sound" of history, be it songs, screams, uproar, machines, bells, or bombs. "The extent to which the authors' individual narrative styles evoke acoustic elements varies dramatically," and sources comprise more indications of "tonal matter" than the authors' texts.⁷¹ This is not only to explore the position of textbooks in our contemporary tonal culture; it is also to question how the past might be vividly evoked and consequently heard by students.

The text of the textbook, as constructed by researchers, is increasingly incorporating multimedia, multiple dimensions, new textual elements, and non-textual elements. It has become more open, rather than focusing on the narrow content that has been the core of former research. It obliges us to approach it as a whole with its inherent narrative structure, rhetoric, and didactical mechanisms.⁷² A textbook "does not tell one univocal story from a certain beginning towards a well-known ending. On the contrary, it is multidimensional and evolves along many narrative layers."⁷³ This change is partly the result of shifts in the layout of the textbook and the importance given to all kinds of documents, especially visual ones, and the activities sections. But it is also a consequence of epistemological studies in linguistics. It has an impact on the concept of narrative itself.

Conclusions

Three different aspects of history textbook research were highlighted during the conference. First, knowledge on teaching and learning history requires an empirical basis in order to develop.⁷⁴ Second, it is significant that the corpus has expanded from the official prescriptions and the content written by textbook authors to a larger definition of narrative and contents." This includes the didactical apparatus and the paratext, observations and interviews that allow for an investigation of the author's

intentions, the teachers' and the students' reception, and the effective use of the history textbooks. Third, the historical depth of textbook writing is equally taken into account, as is the complexity of the system and of the context in which any history textbook is set.

The theoretical references, however important, are less common.⁷⁵ We have stated and discussed the diversity of the methodologies and of the scientific traditions, and the strong influence of classical historical methods on this research field. Methods borrowed from contemporary history, sociology, and ethnology are increasingly in use. But key concepts such as narrative or learning are not sufficiently discussed, and explicit theoretical references about text studies occur only seldom. Models interpreting history textbooks are still to be constructed. But it is difficult to develop history didactics not only as an area for social and political responsibilities but also as a theoretical discipline without such a theoretical framework. A scientific field is not only specified by its objects; it is defined by a shared way of identifying and solving problems, by shared theories and methodologies.

From this perspective, researchers in history didactics probably do not so much require a common terminology as a clearer awareness of the different meaning of our concepts, of their theoretical and cultural backgrounds, of controversial issues, and of their heuristic relevance.

Notes

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